



LONG DISTANCE WALKERS ASSOCIATION

SURREY GROUP

31 Bracken Way, Chobham, Surrey, GU24 8PR

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No E-Mail, No Website, No Ansaphone - just Jurassic

(reluctantly)

WINTER TANNERS - 13th January 2002 - RESULTS

Entries: 330

Starters: 293

Finishers: 207

| | | | |
|---------------|---|----------------------|-------------|
| Organiser: | John Westcott | Certificate Artwork: | Tony Youngs |
| Start: | Dave Green and Dave Challenger. | | |
| Checkpoint 1: | Dave Challenger, Pat Challenger and Dave Green | | |
| Checkpoint 2: | Reg Chapman, Ken Styant and Cynthia McLeod. | | |
| Checkpoint 3: | Sarah (The Tanners Hatch YH Warden, Olive Barnsley, Roy Barnsley and Ray Jolly. | | |
| Finish: | Dave Green. | | |

I never quite got to the bottom of what motivated Alan Blatchford to start the Winter Tanners. He once told me he decided to invite "a few" friends along to the first walk out of the proposed 1976 Tanners Marathon route. This would commit him to doing it rather than allowing an urgent aspect of one of his other many 'leisure' activities to take precedent. On the other hand he also told me he was surprised how popular the Tanners Marathon had become and how "easy" so many were finding it to walk a cross country 30 miles and intimated he would "sort the men from the boys" (women from the girls does not seem quite appropriate) by walking the same 30 miles in tough winter conditions. Whatever the real reason, on the 11th January 1976, a small crowd formed outside the Leatherhead football club (probably greater than the crowd inside on a Saturday afternoon) awaiting a leader who was late enough to give rise to doubts among those assembled whether they had got the right date. When Alan arrived he told us his vehicle had broken down. He produced a map, possibly the OS 1" 170 as the new 1:50000 series (pre Landranger) was still not widely being used. There would be walkers momentarily deserted their starting blocks, 2 of them holding the map against a nearby notice board while the others gathered round and Alan waved his hands over it to indicate where the route of the walk was to go. There was a sketch map with a few notes available but as the number who turned up far exceeded expectations they were hard to come by. I was one of those who missed out and had to rely on keeping with the leader as my means of navigation, a task made easier by his stopping every now and again to consult the map. Although I kept up with the main pack for most of the way I had to give them back towards the end and left to my own my own navigation. I arrived back at Leatherhead with John Probert over an hour later than Alan by a different route. We still got our certificate though and we were included in the results. This goes down in history as the first Winter Tanners.

From the popularity of the pilot it obviously became an annual "informal" walk. The 1978 report mentions a route description but this was written from memory and the map. I seem to remember this was the one which covered the section from Wotton Hatch to the finish (a distance of about 8 miles) "follow Tanners route back to Leatherhead". I have a copy of the 1979 route description which is contained on 1 side of an A4 and is a real work of art in the circumstances but you would need the map to be able to follow it. I would mention that I made the route that year 33 miles rather than the advertised 30 - think yourself lucky those who sarcastically put 30 plus as the intended distance on my 2002 entry form. With the number taking part and being part of the Surrey Group programme, the Winter Tanners had to be accepted as an event in its own right with a surveyed route description available for it. This is where I came in. Alan told me where he wanted the 1980 route to go and I arranged for the route description to be prepared. It seems Alan had to admit he had not sorted the men from the boys (not on this one anyway) for the 1980 report includes

"Years ago it was considered something of a feat to complete the (July) Tanners Marathon within 7 hours but now we have 'walkers' beating this time by a considerable margin". Alan never knew Hilary Walker.

Sadly just 8 months after the 1980 Winter Tanners, Alan died at the age of 44. He had already given me the route for 1981 so I developed it and I naturally fell (or was I pushed) into the role of organiser. After the flair of my predecessor my effort became rather routine. I did not have Alans memory or his aptitude for assessing what was going on so I had to have a more formal approach to the event. Entry forms for instance. I have tried to keep the basic spirit of the event going and that is why, in spite of its popularity I have never tried to "improve" the facilities. For many years I, like Alan, took part but as I slowed down I found it increasingly difficult organise in conjunction with going round the route. Barbara Blatchford acted on behalf of the Tanners Marathon Association to tell me where the route was to go for the 1982 to 1990 events. From 1991 onwards, not only am I to blame for the route description but also where the route goes. In devising the routes each year I have tried to continue the policy making each route different. This is difficult bearing in mind the constraints of having the same venue and that Tanners Hatch Youth Hostel is to be the last checkpoint. Obviously the same paths are used time and again but by using different combinations, walking the paths in reverse and not using the same "distant" area in 2 consecutive years it gives a fair element of the variety I seek. I make it a point to use 1 footpath on each route that, as far as I am aware, has never been used on a Tanners Marathon before. My knowledge only goes back to 1975 whereas the Tanners has been going since 1960 so I cannot always be sure. The route from Tanners YH to the finish tends to be the same each year but I feel regular participants welcome the familiarity of the route at a time when their enthusiasm for the whole thing is beginning to wane.

As the Winter Tanners started as an annual event in 1976, the 25th should normally have been in the year 2000 but there have been 2 years when it did not take place. Following the storms of October 1987 many of the paths were blocked by trees. Barbara, not knowing which paths would be passable in July 1988, could not tell me in January where the route of the Tanners Marathon would go for that year. So we had a "Not the Winter Tanners" instead which as the route tended to keep in the Mole valley instead of taking to the hills turned out to be one of the muddiest ever. As the "Not the Winter Tanners" is included in my completion stats this is inconsistent with the special celebration but if the world can go mad celebrating a 999 year millenium, I can have a 26 event Silver Jubilee to make up for it. The other year missing is 1990. At the time it was considered the Surrey Group had too many events so it was decided to have the Winter Tanners and Punchbowl Marathon alternately every 2 years. A storm of protest restored both events to their annual status.

In 2000 I introduced the option to short cut the 30 mile route to reduce it to app 20. The reason was mainly for would be retirements from the 30 to salvage something from the event and also for the families of 30 mile entrants be able to come along and still take part even though the 30 was too much. In practice the 20 has mainly become an alternative event which has boosted the declining entries. One side effect is that I have lost some of my helpers who now take part.

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Well what of the 25th Winter Tanners - the Silver Jubilee. I wanted to make the route a good one so I went back to basics and included the 3 Greensand hills, Leith, Holmbury and Pitch where you get those spectacular views across the Weald with the South Downs in the background. I had not used the 3 hills together for some time so for me there was an element of nostalgia about it. Some commented on the similarity with The Surrey Summits and The Founders Challenge but the area was Tanners country long before those 2 events were even thought of.

The entry exceeded the 300 mark for only the 2nd time in the history of the event but I must admit it is not fair to compare because, although 2002 is the record, the previous record in 1986 had only the 30 mile option.

There were 295 who turned up at Leatherhead most of whom were milling about the car park in the gloom when I got there. Then the first ones were away just after 7 to shortly be confronted with daylight revealing an overcast day. It did start to drizzle during the start registration but it proved just enough to get the paperwork damp (in spite of our putting it in the boot of my car) before it subsided and having shown what it could do, the rain left us alone for the rest of the day. The dampness persisted however in that it was very misty on the high ground which spoiled those lovely views I had arranged. On the whole though we were lucky with the weather.

The idea of "getting way from it all" was marred by having to compete (in one case I understand literally) with motor cycles and 4WD vehicles along Wolverns Lane. To make it worse the motor cyclists chose as their meeting place the same location as I had chosen for checkpoint 1 much to the disgust of the marshals there who were blasted with the noise of revving engines.

The comments on the route description were generally favourable. Any minor criticism seemed to be directed at doubt which subsequently turned out to be O.K. rather than actual difficulty. However, comparing some of the times between checkpoint 2 and checkpoint 3 there seems to have been some difficulty here. The Volunteer was on this section and I can only assume this is where the difficulty occurred but I have looked at the description again and cannot understand the interpretation that you had to go through the front door of the Volunteer. Among those who perhaps lost their way at this point were 2 lads who were probably trying to keep up the reputation of the Sussex Group.

There were 287 in all who completed their chosen distance. 166 on the 30, 16 the 27 and 105 the 21. It was nice to see among them erstwhile friends who used to regularly be in the Winter Tanners line up (though they had not done so for some time) come back to take part this year. Among these were our Surrey Group ex pats Barbara Bletchford and Dan Hadfield - having both been involved with the Winter Tanners organisation when they were active members of the group before they took up a new life in Cumbria and Gwent respectively. Also I was pleased to see Erica with her husband taking part in this celebration of the event her dad started. I think she had just about learned to walk when the first Winter Tanners took place but she still managed to get her name on the report in the acknowledgement of helpers.

As usual the marshals on the checkpoints did sterling service. I have had many appreciative comments from those taking part of their services and I would like to add my thanks for your help. My apologies to the 2 Daves and Pat for the motor bikes.

I include a table showing all those who have completed 10 or more Winter Tanners. When I sent this table (less the 2002 results) to those involved in October it prompted one person to write to me and I quote from the letter "..... was not surprised to discover another event in which a certain Mr Greaves has a 100% completion!" I understand there are quite a few events on which Martyn has a 100% record including the Surrey Group's Surey Summits which also celebrates its 25th event this year. He has also completed a number of Tanners Marathons although he does not appear in the 20 or more table list for that event and the person who has been round the Tanners route most, summer and winter is John Harrison. Those who appear in both tables are:-

| | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| John Harrison | 26 + 35 = 61 |
| John Gray | 22 + 35 = 57 |
| Mark Pickard | 23 + 25 = 48 |
| Keith Wilkinson | 10 + 35 = 45 |

David Young tops the Tanners Marathon table having completed 38 of the 41

events and he has also completed 5 Winter Tanners and entered this year but could not make it due to a last minute commitment. John Gray is now finding the Winter Tanners mud difficult to cope with so did not enter but he intends taking part in the Tanners Marathon in July.

The numbers taking part and the number of successes of the 25 + 1 events are::

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Year | 76 | 77 | 78 | 79 | 80 | 81 | 82 | 83 | 84 | 85 | 86 | 87 | 88 |
| Starters | 62 | 75 | 65 | 54 | 100 | 141 | 97 | 239 | 233 | 166 | 278 | 152 | 222 |
| Finishers | 46 | 65 | 52 | 46 | 78 | 124 | 92 | 204 | 207 | 147 | 257 | 140 | 204 |

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|-----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Year | 89 | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 | 95 | 96 | 97 | 98 | 99 | 00 | 01 | 02 |
| Starters | 213 | 191 | 216 | 188 | 129 | 141 | 168 | 145 | 147 | 135 | 163 | 208 | 293 |
| Finishers | 191 | 177 | 191 | 142 | 114 | 139 | 163 | 138 | 138 | 124 | 162 | 194 | 287 |

Finally, For those who would like to go round the route again with, I hope a better opportunity to see the views, The 42nd Tanners Marathon is due to take place on SUNDAY 7th July 2002. The 30 mile route will be the same as the Winter Tanners apart from small adjustments to accommodate a different start/finish point and different checkpoints. I understand The Tanners Marathon Association also intend introducing a 20 mile route this year as well as the traditional 30 and 10 mile routes. The 20 mile will start and finish the same as the 30 but it will probably be a different short cut from the Winter Tanners. For further details send SAE to Alan Virgo, The Three Sycamores, French Drive, Thorney, Peterborough. PE6 0PH.

John Westcott

